

of all other countries, save only in places where the Irish or Anglo-Saxon missionaries may have introduced their own, or have modified the already existing styles. And here we may observe that, although our arguments are chiefly derived from the early manuscripts, the results are equally applicable to the contemporary ornamental metal or stone-work; the designs of which are in many cases so entirely the counterparts of those of the manuscripts, as to lead to the conclusion that the designers of the one class of ornaments supplied also the designs for the other. So completely, indeed, is this the case in some of the great stone crosses, that we might almost fancy we were examining one of the pages of an illuminated volume with a magnifying glass.

2. PECULIARITIES OF CELTIC ORNAMENT.—The chief peculiarities of the Celtic ornamentation consist, first, in the entire absence of foliage or other phylomorphic or vegetable ornament,—the classical acanthus being entirely ignored; and secondly, in the extreme intricacy, and excessive minuteness and elaboration, of the various patterns, mostly geometrical, consisting of interlaced ribbon-work, diagonal or spiral lines, and strange, monstrous animals and birds, with long top-knots, tongues, and tails, intertwining in almost endless knots.

The most sumptuous of the manuscripts, such for instance as the Book of Kells, the Gospels of Lindisfarne and St. Chad, and some of the manuscripts at St. Gall, have entire pages covered with the most elaborate patterns in compartments, the whole forming beautiful cruciform designs, one of these facing the commencement of each of the four Gospels. The labour employed in such a mass of work* must have been very great; the care infinite, since the most scrutinizing examination with a magnifying glass will not detect an error in the truth of the lines, or the regularity of the interlacing; and yet, with all this minuteness, the most harmonious effect of colouring has been produced.

Contrary to the older plan of commencing a manuscript with a letter in noways or scarcely differing from the remainder of the text, the commencement of each Gospel opposite to these grand tessellated pages was ornamented in an equally elaborate manner. The initial letter was often of gigantic size, occupying the greater part of the page, which was completed by a few of the following letters or words, each letter generally averaging about an inch in height. In these initial pages, as in those of the cruciform designs, we find all the various styles of ornament employed in more or less detail.

The most universal and singularly-diversified ornament employed by artificers in metal, stone, or manuscripts, consists of one or more narrow ribbons interlaced and knotted, often excessively intricate in their convolutions, and often symmetrical and geometrical. Plates LXIII. and LXIV. exhibit numerous examples of this ornament in varied styles. By colouring the ribbons with different tints, either upon a coloured or black ground, many charming effects are produced. Of the curious intricacy of some of these designs, an idea may easily be obtained by following the ribbon in some of these patterns; as, for instance, in the upper compartment in Fig. 5 of Plate LXIII. Sometimes two ribbons run parallel to each other, but are interlaced alternately, as in Fig. 12 of Plate LXIV. When allowable the ribbon is dilated and angulated to fill up particular spaces in the design, as in Plate LXIV., Fig. 11. The simplest modification of this pattern of course is the double oval, seen in the angles of Fig. 27, Plate LXIV. This occurs in Greek and Syriac MSS., in Roman tessellated pavements, but rarely in our early MSS. Another simple form is that known as the triquetra, which is extremely common in MSS. and metal-work; an instance in which four of these triquetrae are introduced occurs in Plate LXIV., Fig. 36. Figures 30 and 35 in the same Plate are modifications of this pattern.

* In one of these pages in the Gospels of St. Chad, which we have taken the trouble to copy, there are not fewer than one hundred and twenty of the most fantastic animals.

Another very distinguishing ornament profusely introduced into early work of all kind consists of monstrous animals, birds, lizards, and snakes of various kinds, generally extravagantly elongated, with tails, top-knots, and tongues, extended into long interlacing ribbons, intertwining together in the most fantastic manner; often symmetrical, but often irregular, being drawn so as to fill up a required space. Occasionally, but of rare occurrence, the human figure is also thus introduced; as on one of the panels of the Monasterboice Cross in the Crystal Palace, where are four figures thus singularly intertwined, and on one of the bosses of the Duke of Devonshire's Lismore crozier are several such fantastic groups. In Plate LXIII. are groups of animals thus intertwined. The most intricate examples are the groups of eight dogs (Plate LXV., Fig. 17) and eight birds (Plate LXV., Fig. 15) from one of the St. Gall MSS., and the most elegant is the marginal ornament (Plate LXV., Fig. 8) from the Gospels of Mac Durnan, at Lambeth Palace. In the later Irish and Welsh MSS. the edges of the interlaced ribbons touch each other, and the designs are far less geometrical and much more confused. The strange design (Plate LXV., Fig. 16) is no other than the initial Q of the Psalm, Quid Gloriaris, from the Psalter of Ricemarchus, Bishop of St. David's, A.D. 1088. It will be seen that it is intended for a monstrous animal, with one top-knot extended in front over its nose, and a second forming an extraordinary whorl above the head, the neck with a row of pearls, the body long and angulated, terminated by two contorted legs and grim claws, and a knotted tail, which it would be difficult, indeed, for the animal to unravel. Very often, also, the heads alone of birds or beasts form the terminal ornament of a pattern, of which various examples occur in Plate LXIV., the gaping mouth and long tongue forming a not ungraceful finish.

The most characteristic, however, of all the Celtic patterns, is that produced by two or three spiral lines starting from a fixed point, their opposite extremities going off to the centres of coils formed by other spiral lines. Plate LXV., Figs. 1, 5, and 12, are instances of this ornament, all more or less magnified; and Fig. 22, which is of the real size. Plate LXIII., Fig. 3, shows how ingeniously this pattern may be converted into the diagonal pattern. In the MSS., and all the finer and more ancient metal and stone-work, these spiral lines always take the direction of a C, and never that of a S. It is, therefore, evident, not only from the circumstance, but also from the irregularity of the design itself, that the central ornament in Plate LXIII., Fig. 1, was not drawn by an artist skilled in the genuine Celtic patterns, but indicates a certain amount either of carelessness or of extraneous influence. This pattern has also been called the trumpet pattern, from the spaces between any two of the lines forming a long, curved design, like an ancient Irish trumpet, the mouth of which is represented by the small pointed oval placed transversely at the broad end. Instances in metal-work of this pattern occur in several circular objects of bronze of unknown use, about a foot in diameter, occasionally found in Ireland; also in small, circular, enamelled plates of early Anglo-Saxon work, found in different parts of England. It is more rarely found in stone-work, the only instance of its occurrence in England, as far as we are aware, being on the font of Deerhurst Church. Bearing in mind that this ornament does not appear in MSS. executed in England after the ninth century, we may conclude that this is the oldest ornamented font in this country.

Another equally characteristic pattern is composed of diagonal lines, never interlacing, but generally arranged at equal intervals apart, forming a series of Chinese-like patterns,* and which, as the letter Z, or Z reversed, seems to be the primary element, may be termed the Z pattern. It is capable of great modification, as may be seen in Plate LXV., Figs. 6, 4, 9, 10, 11, and 13. In the more elaborate MSS. it is purely geometrical and regular, but in rude work it degenerates into an irregular design, as in Plate LXIII., Figs. 1 and 3.

* Several of the patterns given in the upper part of the Chinese Plate LIX. occur with scarcely any modification in our stone and metal-work, as well as in our MSS.